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SUBJECT: BUHARI TO RUN ON ANPP TICKET

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (U) One of Buhari's political advisors, Sule Yahaya Hama, told the press on July 25 that 2003 Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari would run again in 2007 on the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) platform. He said the The Buhari Organization (TBO) had continued to work for the past several years and would continue to form the core of Buhari's campaign. Hama pointed out that currently at least seven candidates have announced their intention to contest on the ANPP ticket, including Governor Sani Ahmed (Zamfara), Dr. Lema Jibrilu, Bashir Tofa and Dr. Pere Ajuwa.

¶2. (U) This follows a statement Buhari made at a memorial lecture over the weekend in which he stated that he had been a victim of a "rigged election" in 2003 and that he "had no confidence in the present composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)." He also called for the "total reorganization" of INEC. Buhari pointed out that INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu had recently employed many "card-carrying members" of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and said that it was important to make INEC "impartial and acceptable to all parties and candidates" before the 2007 elections.

¶3. (U) Buhari and National Conscience Party leader and political gadfly Gani Fawehinmi each called for Nigerians to unite in the fight against "election rigging and other malpractice" to save Nigeria's democracy.

¶4. (C) In an earlier meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Buhari set out three

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issues that he planned to engage in preparatory to his 2007 election campaign. He said that he was working within the convoluted political landscape for a realignment of the parties in the wake of the illegal expulsion of many members of the PDP and President Obasanjo's failed third term effort. Additionally, he said that resolving problems in the electoral process were important as was the garnering of international support for electoral transparency and reform.

¶5. (C) He said that the efforts of the PDP to encourage regionalism in the national polity since 1999 "disappointed" him. Buhari lamented that the emphasis on ethnicity and religion were signs that the current political parties have not "matured or proved themselves through party activities and governance." He went on to complain that regionalism was even more pronounced today than in the 2003 elections.

¶6. (C) Buhari claimed that "the parties' structures are

weaker and they focus even more" on a political divisiveness based on regions than ever before in Nigeria's history. He blamed many of the current problems on Obasanjo's "desire for a one-party state" and pointed out that the PDP now is divided into at least five competing factions.

17. (C) Buhari said the regional conflicts in the Delta, the Southeast and in the Middle Belt are driven by the political culture of "taking our own from the cake first" and exacerbated by a fractured social life brought on by poverty. He said, however, that he believed that many of the current problems would be resolved if Nigerians were allowed to elect their leaders. "If the candidates were not imposed and Nigerians participate in the process" the Delta would be calmer. Further, when that happens, the political leaders will be more responsible to the electorate and more attentive to the provision of basic good, Buhari concluded.

18. (C) Other elements of Buhari's outreach efforts include ongoing contacts with the political establishment in the Southeast. He has renewed his cooperation with Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, leader of the All Peoples Grand Alliance (APGA), and plans to coordinate political rallies and speeches with leaders of this group. In addition, he has received visitors from the current government, including an emissary from President Obasanjo who wanted to compare visions for Nigeria after the 2007 election. Some members of the economic reform team have also sought out meetings with Buhari, who is the brother-in-law of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chairman Nuhu Ribadu, although the reason for these meetings, other than to discuss the continuation of President Obasanjo's economic reform program, is unclear.

19. (C) COMMENT: Buhari is viewed as honest and straightforward, a novelty in the Nigerian political landscape. His support is based on this reputation, a

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support which limits his ability to make political compromises. While his campaign remains below the radar screen and he is hampered by the lack of access to the billions of Naira that classical analysts see as the lubricant for Nigerian elections, he enjoys something that few other Nigerians enjoy: genuine spontaneous grassroots support. Whether that will be enough for him to campaign effectively for the position that many in Nigeria now believe he won in 2003 remains to be seen.
FUREY